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The Menace of Secession in Africa and Why Governments Should Care: The Disparate Cases of Katanga, Biafra, South Sudan, and Azawad

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Abstract - If there were an imminent threat to the integrity of African states, it would be the possibility of a group or region breaking away. Ironically, secession is one threat which few African governments want to acknowledge exists because it implies giving tacit recognition to the most reprehensible behavior any group or a region can perpetrate against the state. Pursuing such a policy of not acknowledging the threat of secession has come at a price, since it has made governments woefully unprepared to address an actual secession effectively when it occurs. African governments' lackadaisical response to the menace of secession is not only bad policy but also counter-intuitive. The haphazard manner in which European powers spliced the continent into colonies makes every country vulnerable to potentially splitting up for myriad of reasons including a simple disagreement between a region and the central government. This paper makes the assertion that a region breaking away is such an imminent threat to African countries that governments need to pay attention and commit resources to address its causes. Mali splintering into halves in 2012 shows the imminency of the threat of secession and the unpredictable causes that may precipitate such an event. The paper analyzes Katanga, Biafra and South Sudan breaking up to underscore the unpredictability of events which may cause a country to break up.

Keywords : *Secession, Katanga, Biafra, Azawad, South Sudan, Casamance, Eritrea, Ethiopia, SPLA, MEND, Tuaregs, Igbo, Ojukwu, Lumumba, Tshombe.*

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The Menace of Secession in Africa and Why Governments Should Care: The Disparate Cases of Katanga, Biafra, South Sudan, and Azawad

Napoleon Bamfo

Abstract - If there were an imminent threat to the integrity of African states, it would be the possibility of a group or region breaking away. Ironically, secession is one threat which few African governments want to acknowledge exists because it implies giving tacit recognition to the most reprehensible behavior any group or a region can perpetrate against the state. Pursuing such a policy of not acknowledging the threat of succession has come at a price, since it has made governments woefully unprepared to address an actual secession effectively when it occurs. African governments' lackadaisical response to the menace of secession is not only bad policy but also counter-intuitive. The haphazard manner in which European powers spliced the continent into colonies makes every country vulnerable to potentially splitting up for myriad of reasons including a simple disagreement between a region and the central government. This paper makes the assertion that a region breaking away is such an imminent threat to African countries that governments need to pay attention and commit resources to address its causes. Mali splintering into halves in 2012 shows the imminence of the threat of secession and the unpredictable causes that may precipitate such an event. The paper analyzes Katanga, Biafra and South Sudan breaking up to underscore the unpredictability of events which may cause a country to break up.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Observing African politics clearly reveals the continent is racked with conflict. These conflicts range from political protests to wars breaking out within countries and externally between countries that share a common border. Most conflicts which have occurred, however, have been confined within national borders. Conflict which occurs inside countries' borders often bears the hallmark of one or more groups squabbling over a natural wealth or a region deciding unilaterally to end its association with a government because of ideological or policy differences. A misunderstanding that arises between a region or an ethnic group and the central government can lay

dormant for several years until it explodes unexpectedly into mayhem which can destroy families, relationships, and traditions. The governments of Ethiopia and Sudan failing to address grievances of outlying regions satisfactorily for one-half century steered those regions to war, resulting in Eritrea and South Sudan separating to form new nations. In spite of several cases of internally-generated dissensions and weak governmental structures, it is remarkable that many more African countries have not been torn apart. However, the handful of cases on secession could be misleading because they offer a false impression the issues that can tear apart the relationship between a region and a central government have not been grievous or been adroitly resolved. In reality the sorry state of relationships between regions and central governments in Africa is far from clear. In each country, regions want the central government to address outstanding issues to their satisfaction as government also have wanted regions to play their part by being responsible partners and acquiescing to their edicts. No government can be complacent addressing the issues for which a region or group seeks redress. None may be redundant. Complacency may only push the region or ethnic group to the brink by seeking separation from the union with ramifications that are hard to foretell.

This paper draws on secondary sources of research sources as well as current news from the Internet to address secession by drawing attention to the imminence of its menace to the integrity of African countries. African governments, on the other hand, seem less troubled by it than they are about issues that revolve around people's daily subsistence. This may be a perilous miscalculation since, when a country is unexpectedly hit with the possibility of any of its regions wanting to break away, that country may never reclaim the cohesion and pride it once had. Suspicion is sown instantaneously into the relationships that used to exist among people, groups and regions. The paper uses Katanga, Biafra, South Sudan and Azawad breaking away to show the multiplicity of the causes which may precipitate a region deciding to leave a political union. The ongoing saga of northern Mali breaking away to

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form a new country— Azawad— is referenced to illustrate the imminency and unpredictability of the threat which discontented regions may pose to central governments. The demands groups make which can push a region to break away have usually been precipitated from the group or region perceiving unequal treatment from the central government relative to other regions or groups. The demands of grievances might lay dormant for years until a 'triggering incident' resuscitates it. A triggering incident could come in various forms such as Igbos being killed in Nigeria in 1966, or the people of Katanga believing in their exceptionalism relative to other Congolese and breaking away. Every African government, therefore, it seems must feel a sense of unease and be alert in order to ameliorate situations which may push a region or an ethnic group to the brink.

II. THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL BORDERS

One controversial but enduring legacy European colonialism left Africa was national borders. Breaking such a large continent into smaller sovereign nations has helped to create unique identities among people which have become powerful symbols of national pride and interest. At the same time, the haphazard manner in which nations were created has caused irredentist urgings by groups on other groups which might have been minimal had the colonialists taken greater care clustering groups into countries. Colonial administrators broke up or clustered people, languages, customs and alliances with little rational guidance from history, tradition, and logic. Not surprisingly, the conflicts that have occurred between nations are blamed on the haphazard demarcation of borders (Hughes, 2004). According to Herbst (1989), European colonialists ignored some basic guidelines for partitioning land such as making such important decisions on scanty information about Africa's geography, and dividing territories without taking time to consider demographic, ethnographic and topographic imperatives. The haphazardness shown for cartography was expected because, according to Stone, the Berlin Conference was called mainly to defend the traditional long-standing free-trading system which Europe had set up along the coast of Africa. Colonial administrators and new African governments tried to adhere closely to the boundaries they had inherited to uphold the principle of *uti possidetis*, which provides that states emerging from decolonization shall presumptively inherit the colonial administrative borders they held at independence (Ratner, 1996). That understanding has done little to dampen calls coming from some governments to clarify their boundaries with their neighbors, which is a euphemism for getting a piece of territory back.

Legum (1962) was an observer who, early in Africa's independence decade, denounced Africa's

artificial borders and called for abolishing or adjusting them. Delegates at the first Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in Addis Ababa in 1963, however, opted to support the inviolability of national borders as one of the organization's core principles. In 1964, the OAU formally backed this principle at the Cairo's Declaration of Border Disputes among African States. The OAU, obviously, was seeking to avoid opening a Pandora's Box as it sought to discourage groups from making irredentist claims on other group outside their common border. Memorable claims of such nature have occurred nonetheless. They have been between Egypt and Libya in 1977 when Libyan forces occupied Sallum in Egypt. Egypt and Sudan have had a dispute over the Hala 'ib Triangle wedged between them. Ethiopia and Somalia have fought over the Ogaden, and Libya and Chad over the Aouzou Strip. Nigeria and Cameroon had disputations over Bakassi, and Ethiopia and Eritrea have fought for control over Badme. Mazrui (1993) predicted that ethnic conflict would present continual problems in politics, and over the next century the outlines of present-day African states would change in one of two ways. The first would be ethnic self-determination which would create smaller states and the other— regional integration— will create larger political communities and economic unions.

Where a region or an ethnic group is located relative to other regions has been an important but often overlooked factor that determines whether a disenfranchised group or region will stay in a political union. A region or group hemmed in by other groups or regions is circumscribed by geography to accept a compromise with the government in a dispute, even if the group finds the solution distasteful. Secession is a treasonable act and is easier for those who participate in it to escape to a neighboring state if the plot goes awry. Location also affects an insurgent group's ability to get money outside its home base to resist government authority. The ability of rebel groups to get major funding from contraband such as opium, diamonds, or coca determines the duration of civil wars (Fear on, 2004). The considerable distance from Punt land and Somaliland to Mogadishu, where a weak provisional federal government has been battling insurgents, provided the impetus for the two renegade northeastern regions of Somalia to declare their autonomy.¹

III. DOMESTIC INSURGENCIES

a) Katanga

Belgium had vested business and commercial interest in the Congo, its colony, and was unwilling to grant it independence. This was the time when Africa's major colonial powers of France and Great Britain were granting their colonies independence. In late 1950, however, following protests in Kinshasa and other large cities Belgium was compelled to grant a hastily-

arranged independence to the Congo (Democratic Republic). Van Bilsen (1962) asserts that the choice Belgium faced was tragic: it either could grant independence immediately to a country which was in no way prepared for it or undertake a policy of slow decolonization with all the risk of misunderstanding, disorder, and repressive action involved. According to Bokamba (1986), Congo had serious regional and ethnic divisions (with some 200 separate language groups) and a weak sense of national identity. Besides, very few Congolese had had any meaningful political experience prior to independence, and there were only a handful of them with university degrees. Belgium failing to train the Congolese in administrative competence or giving them political experience or a system of government that might work contributed to plunging the country into the mayhem it experienced after independence.

An army mutiny occurred in Katanga Province (Shaba) and Southern Kasai soon after independence that led to bloodshed. These provinces were the center of diamond mining in Congo. The mutiny resulted in Katanga pulling out from Congo Leopoldville. The rebellion in Katanga lasted from 1960 to 1963. Kaplan (1967) asserts that Belgium, at the instigation of Moïse Tshombe, the Prime Minister of Katanga Province, used the mutiny by the Force Publique against Belgian officers to intervene on behalf of Belgian civilians in the Congo as stories circulated of violence committed against Belgians by soldiers spread. Tshombe's rise to fame began in the 1950s when he became president of the Belgian-supported Conakat, the strongest political party in Katanga. When he attended the Brussels Congo Conference in 1960 he pressed for a loose federation of independent states in the Congo. In the general elections of 1960, Conakat gained control of the Katanga provincial legislature, and when the Congo became an independent republic, Tshombe proclaimed Katanga's secession from the country. He worked closely with Belgian business interests, appointed a Belgian officer to command his army, and refused to cooperate with either the United Nations or the central government led by Patrice Lumumba (Columbia Electronic, 2011).

Lemarchand (1962) also argues Katanga had a strong case for self-determination based on the extraordinary concentration of economic resources in the province, especially the presence of rare minerals such as cobalt and uranium. The province also had heavy industrial development compared with the rest of the Congo. According to Crowley (1963), Katanga was second only to Orientale in size among the six Congo provinces and was the richest, providing 65 percent of all Congo exports. The huge mining company of Union Minière du Haut-Katanga alone paid one-third of the Congo's budget. The province's riches helped to explain why nearly a third of all the non-Africans in the Congo

(28,455 out of 94,531 in 1955) lived in Katanga. In contrast, the Katanga's African population of one and one-half million was the smallest of any province. Katanga's sparse population called for migrant workers being imported from Europe and other parts of the Congo into the province with their cultural and linguistic differences causing ethnic tensions. According to Lemarchand (1962, p. 408), one settler organization in Katanga, *Union pour la Colonization (Uco)*, sought to make the province different from the rest of the Congo by using all efforts to get the white population the liberties granted by the Belgian constitution to the expatriates in the Congo and to promote, by all available means, the growth of European colonization. Belgium's role in helping Katanga to secede and taking additional measures to sustain the breakaway state to develop was beyond dispute, according to Boehme (2005). Belgium did not want its relationship with the newly-independent nation to end not only for sentimental reasons but economic considerations as well. Fresh from breaking away, Katanga asked Belgium for help and Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens' government obliged, and was willing to recognize Katanga's de facto independence. In July 1960, the Belgian government created the Mission Technique Belge (Mistebel), an organization that would supply assistance to the breakaway province. Belgian policymakers, however, were not unanimous in the government's decision to accommodate the breakaway state. On July 12, 1960, Congo's Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, lodged a complaint with the United Nations Secretary-General on behalf of the Congo government. It contained an official protest against the Belgian-backed partition of the southern province of Katanga under the leadership of Moïse Tshombé. The Security Council accepted the complaint and passed Resolution 143, which gave the Secretary-General the right "to take the necessary steps, in consultation with the government of the Republic of Congo, to provide the Government with such military assistance, as may be necessary."

b) Biafra

Tukumo (1970) asserts Biafra pulling away from Nigeria in 1967 was an overt act even though before that time, it had been an idea. Secessionist threats or separatist agitations in Nigeria date back as far as 1914, during the Lugard's Amalgamation of that year. Northerners believed the amalgamation was a mistake because they did not want anything to do with the Southern people. The disparate manner in which Nigerian nationalism developed foreshadowed the ethnic divisions that would emerge after independence. According to Nafziger and Richter (1976), ethnic nationalism grew stronger as other groups sensed their own lack of participation in the benefits of modernization and self-government and joined the struggle. Yoruba nationalism heightening in 1948 was partly in response

to the disproportionate weight Igbos were exerting on the leadership of the Nigerian nationalist movement. Hausa nationalism was aroused later in response to the threat of southern economic and political supremacy. Not surprisingly, politics in post-independent Nigeria became controversial as the three major groups— the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo— failed to get along. According to Nafziger, the January 1966 coup epitomized this crisis. Nigeria's politics was pushed to the brink following the abortive counting of the population by region for federal parliamentary representation, the boycott of the federal election by one of the two major political alliances, and the resulting refusal of President Azikiwe to appoint a Prime Minister from the victorious party. Following the coup of 1966, relations between the major ethnic groups worsened, as thousands of Igbo living in the north were massacred. Ojukwu, the leader of the Igbo resistance, removed part of the eastern region from the Nigerian federation to form the Republic of Biafra. The federal government immediately declared war on Biafra in 1967 and successfully ended the secession in 1970.

Deciding whether Biafra had a claim to independence, Nixon (1972) asserts the distinct circumstance which led to the Biafran claim to independence began in May 1966, with a series of attacks against the people of the Eastern Region living in the North. New and even more extensive massacres in the North in September 1966 and the mass migrations that followed intensified the fears Easterners had for their physical safety. This worsened tensions between the Eastern Region and the federal government. Post (1968) believes Biafra pulling out of the federation was based on the unequal sharing of national wealth. The Nigerian Independence Constitution of 1960 redistributed revenue by a series of formulas, which allowed the regions to get between 65 and 75 percent of their funding from federal payments. The Eastern region's special grievance was that it was receiving only about 60 percent of the rents and royalties from the oil produced there. Easterners believed the other regions were cheating the region out of development capital for which there were no guidelines for its sharing. These grievances, together with others, precipitated the January 1966 coup, which was started by Igbo officers. The major victims of the coup were politicians and senior officers from the north. Since early 2000, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) formed with the sole purpose of driving away foreign oil companies from the Delta region and returning oil money to the indigenous people of the Delta. The 2003 "Niger Delta Manifesto" gives a rambling account of the history of the plunder of oil by colonialists and the Nigerian government in the Delta region ("The Niger Delta Manifesto", 2003).

c) *South Sudan*

Southern Sudan fighting a war of liberation for half a century against the Egyptian authority and later the Sudanese government seemed precipitated less by economic benefits than the cultural differences that exist between the North and South. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in both the North and South in the 1980s, however, raised the stakes for the South to break away. The struggles for the peoples of South Sudan to be free came to fruition in July 2011, when an independent republican nation was born. Sudan was the largest country in Africa and, under the best of conditions, the vast expanse of land and diversity of its people posed a formidable challenge for any government wanting to keep an active line of communication with all its regions and peoples. Barbour (1964) and Deng (2006) describe the contrasting rates of development between the north and south as important in understanding the issues in Sudanese politics. They include the South's strikingly high gross reproduction and death rates, high infant mortality rates, poor diet, medical services, and education which fell far below the rest of the country. The most striking contrast was the North being occupied principally by Arabic-speaking Muslims, while the South was occupied by African Negroid peoples, some of which are Christian. Southerners believed the government in Khartoum, which was dominated by the Muslim North, was lukewarm to its development and imposed discriminatory laws on the people found there.

According to Tucker (1934), up to the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Sudan government paid no attention to developing any official language in the South. All official intercourse with southern natives was through Arabic, the official language of the North, even though pronouncing the sounds and arranging the syllables of Arabic or '*Bimbashi Arabic*' were distorted. Johnson (2003) also sees multiple causes for the North and South conflict, which include the British manipulating ethnic rivalry during colonial rule and the North continuing a long pattern of oppressing the South. Distrust caused southern soldiers to mutiny against the Khartoum government in 1955, plunging the country into a seventeen-year civil war; the so-called Anya Nya rebellion, which ended with a compromise for southern autonomy in 1972 (Bell, 1975). Despite the peace agreement between the North and South holding four years after signing, Kasfir (1977) was doubtful it would last. His pessimism was based on the pervasive suspicion which existed between the parties and the scattered incidents of violence and concessions which aroused dissatisfaction among influential groups in both the North and South.

War was rekindled in 1983, when President Nimeiri decided to impose Islamic law on all Sudan,

triggering the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forming in response, seizing most of the South and starting another civil war. According to Hutchinson (2001), the birth of the SPLA caused the fighting between the North and South to intensify as the SPLA made overthrowing the northern-dominated, national, Islamic state in Khartoum one of its objectives. Khartoum and the SPLA reached a peace agreement in 2005 to end the rebellion, but the impromptu death of John Garang, the SPLA leader, rekindled distrust. Hutchinson asserts the hatred between the North and South ran deep, not the least of which was southerners not forgiving northerners for being accessories to the slave trade in the south in the nineteenth century during the Egyptian occupation. Despite deep geographical differences, Roden (1974), however, sees social rather than physical causes as the root of the problems in the Sudan, stemming from strong differences in culture, especially in attitudes. Cultural differences have been reinforced by wide disparities in the spatial sharing of investment. In recent years, water and oil have become major resource issues in the south. Present-day Sudanese politics also has been dominated by the plight of the thousands of refugees in Darfur and their slaughter by the Janjaweed who are government-backed militias, and the government's refusal to cooperate to prosecute the perpetrators of those crimes.

d) Other secessions: Successful, failed, and ongoing

Governments in several countries in Africa also have contended with threats that had come from groups wanting self-rule and ending their long association with the central political authority. Some of these agitations for self-rule have shown greater poignancy than others. In Ethiopia, the threat from its coastal colony to break away lasted thirty years and culminated in a costly war which ended in 1991, with Eritrea emerging as a breakaway state. Ethiopia officially agreed to Eritrea's independence in 1993 and made Eritrea the first successful breakaway nation in post-independent Africa. Eritrea breaking away from Ethiopia was attributable primarily to political rather than economic or cultural differences. The major ethnic groups of Ethiopia and Eritrea share a common history and culture. In Eritrea, the Tigrinya, Tigre and Kunama are found along the common border with Ethiopia, and politically, were governed under the Ethiopian flag for sixty years. The dominant religions in both countries are Christianity and Islam, and trade and cultural exchanges have always happened among the diverse groups living in the northeastern region of Africa for a long time. What brought marked changes to the region's political development was Italy colonizing Eritrea in 1890, which made Eritreans to see themselves differently from Ethiopians. Italy streamlining governance in both Eritrea and Ethiopia under its rule did not heal the rifts which strong imperious ambitions wrought. According to

Yohannes (1993), the British liberation of Eritrea and Ethiopia's resulting in annexation of Eritrea in 1942, were viewed skeptically by Eritreans from the start. Ethiopia desperately needed access to the Red Sea, but Eritreans opposed the blatant manner in which Emperor Haile Selassie interfered with its affairs when the Emperor declared it the fourteenth province. The poor living conditions in Ethiopia caused by drought and famine gave Eritreans little hope their living conditions would improve if their political association with Ethiopia continued. Eritrea's economy ironically, has not fared any better since it pulled out from its union with Ethiopia. According to Bereketab (2007), the second war with Ethiopia in 1998 set Eritrea's economy back.

There are other regions in Africa which, like Eritrea and Ethiopia, have had tensions caused by different colonial histories as well as cultural and linguistic differences. The sear the Casamance and Senegal, Cabinda and Angola, The Volta Region of Ghana and Togo, and Anglophone Cameroon and Francophone Cameroon. Since the mid-1980s, Northern Uganda, which is populated chiefly by the Acholi, has suffered from civil unrest perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony, himself an Acholi and a smaller organization, the Allied Democratic Forces. Kony intends to rule Uganda according to "Ten Commandment Principles" and has abducted several thousand children and pillaged several villages in the northern region, leaving nearly half a million people homeless.²The Casamance, a region in southern Senegal, has become that country's most restless region since early 1980, when the Movement of Democratic forces of Casamance (MDFC) began a violent confrontation with the Senegalese government for self-rule. Casamance used to be a Portuguese region before France and Portugal negotiated a settlement which handed over the territory to France. The region's history, location, and poor economic condition have provided the impetus for separatism. Niger was plunged into civil war from 1990 to 1995 when independent-minded Nigeriens and ethnic Tuaregs opposed to the central government wanted autonomy for northern Niger. Rebels seeking autonomy attacked the capital, Niamey, followed by reprisal attacks from government forces arresting Tuaregs en masse. In 1995, the largest Tuareg coalition, the Coordination of Armed Resistance, agreed to a limited autonomy and signed a peace accord with the Nigerien government.

Mali's government is facing its gravest threat yet from these Tuareg rebels. On April 6, 2012, rebels from the northern half of the country, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), declared the northern half of Mali an independent state under the name Azawad. The new state covers more than half of Mali and includes Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. According to Burgess (2012), the rebellion which kicked off in January 2011 owes its success in large part to Gaddafi

who recruited Tuareg fighters into his security forces and when his regime fell, they fled back to Mali with large stockpiles of weapons. The estimated two to three thousand experienced, well-armed returning Tuareg fighters were angry not only by the events in Libya but President Amadou Toure's government's lackadaisical attitude addressing the problems their return created. Polgreen (2012) and Cowell(2012) assert this made the Tuareg fighters to reinvigorate the longstanding rebellion they have had with the central government. The Mali army made mainly of sub-Saharan Africans which had previously held the upper hand against the lightly armed Tuaregs was now facing a heavily armed and determined enemy (Brode, 2012). The aftermath of the rebellion was a coup d'état spearheaded by Captain Sonogo that overthrew President Amadou Toure on March 22, 2012. Many members of the Malian army believed the ousted president was not equipping them well enough, not sending reinforcements when needed, and keeping the population in the dark about the deaths of government troops. Ironically, the rebels announced Azawad's independence after the coup.

The Tuareg disenchantment with Mali's central government runs deep and goes back several years. One cause has been their dislike for being dominated, first by French colonialists, which they fiercely resisted, and second, by the Bamako government. As Prasse (1995) notes, the "Tuareg must exist largely at the mercy of hostile ruling powers since the departure of their colonial masters." Lecocq (2005) describes the Tuareg society as being stratified with the upper strata being white, even of European descent. The lower strata, on the other hand, are made up of blacksmiths and blacks. Indeed, the Tuareg kept black slaves, *bellah*, for several years until they were emancipated in the 1940s by French colonial administrators. Since 1970, harsh living conditions resulting from drought have precipitated a southward migration of the population which has brought confusion to social and political structures (Dresch, et al. 1977). The Tuareg rebellion, which began in 1996 and lasted until 1998 was violent and persistent, and spilled from an earlier Tuareg rebellion in Niger against the government. The United States, because of its War onTerror, militarized the governments of the Sahel, bringing further instability to the region. Keenan (2004) shows how Tuaregs attacking humanitarian convoys in Mali in 2004 caused deaths. Besides, a long-standing feud between Kounta and Arab Tribes erupted in a fresh outbreak of fighting.

IV. AFRICA'S SECESSIONS: AN ASSESSEMENT

a) *The contentiousness of sharing wealth*

Economic considerations— precisely, a region or a group assessing if it would get greater economic benefits by breaking away than staying put will always be an important and recurring variable which will weigh

heavily on the decision the region or group makes. Colonialism left a legacy to colonies in how they defined their commodity exports, as farmers were given a wide array of crops and minerals in which to specialize. Regions that are large-scale producers of export commodities like cocoa, coffee, tea or precious minerals such as gold and diamonds are compelled, through monopolistic buying by marketing boards, to contribute money to the common fund. In most African nations, the manner in which government allots money to regions may not be defined by the locus of production or need but by politics. Regions that wield political power or dominate the civil service may reward themselves the most. Based on central governments' tradition of putting taxes from exports into a common fund, regions lacking in high-value minerals and crops have been more accepting of their budgetary allotment from the government. Regions endowed with high-value minerals and crops, on the other hand, expect to be compensated a little bit more.³What stands out about public revenues in most African countries is governments' overreliance on a single crop or mineral for exports. Countries endowed with plentiful natural resources, ironically, have been prone to violence because of disagreements over the manner in which governments and producers share money. While disagreements between government and farmers over commodities pricing, for instance, may be tampered by pragmatism, the same cannot be said for nonorganic minerals such as gold and oil. Agricultural and forest products spread across several regions and make organizing for civil action difficult. Oil, diamonds, and gold and other minerals, on the other hand, are found in specific areas and are nonreplenishable. Extracting those minerals is contentious as local landowners, the government, and private companies haggle over pricing and farmland degradation. Fearon (2005) puts oil at the top of minerals that may spark civil war. Oil, he explains, provides easy source of rebel start-up finance and because oil producers have low state capacities given their low per capita income, also oil makes state or regional control a 'tempting prize.' The volatile politics of Angola's enclave of Cabinda and Nigeria's Delta Region, both major oil producing regions, and of the diamond-producing districts of Kono and Koidu in Sierra Leone supports Fearon's thesis. The thesis shows that other high-value minerals can incite violence, too. Decalo (1985) admits that African politics even during the heyday of independence has always been a privilege reserved for the elite, with social repression as an alternative method for keeping power in the face of declining legitimacy and societal scarcity. Besides, poor training, corruption, and nepotism in public bureaucracies have ensured that only the opinions of the ruling elite stand in policy decisions. Fearon and Laitin (2003) have challenged conventional wisdom about the manner in which civil wars have spread since

the end of the Cold War. They argue that conflicts are not caused by ethnic and religious antagonisms, but poverty and weak bureaucracies have become major sources of insurgencies. Weak bureaucracies translate into weak local policing or inept and corrupt counterinsurgency practices such as an inclination for brutal and indiscriminate retaliation that help to drive noncombatants into rebel forces.

b) Sundry causes for breaking away

Some disaffected groups have used economic sabotage, expressed overtly or covertly by destroying production equipment, to show their displeasure with government policy. Disaffected groups that feel powerless taking on the central government in a secession attempt may find engaging in economic sabotage a viable, cost-effective option. MEND, realizing the enormous military capability of the Nigerian government has opted for a strategy of hurting Nigeria's economy by sabotaging oil equipment and hampering production in the Niger Delta. MEND has not given up on its ultimate goal of seeing the Niger Delta region break away from Nigeria. In 2007, at the height of MEND's campaign, Mouawad (2007) reported there were few safe places left for oil companies in the Niger Delta, the epicenter of Nigeria's petroleum industry. It reported armed rebel gangs blowing up pipelines, disabling pumping stations, and kidnapping over 150 foreign oil workers since 2006. Later that year, Shell shut down about one-half million barrels a day of production from its fields. Jackson (1992, p.2) argues that the weak link between governments and citizens in sub-Saharan Africa has been the cause of states lacking empirical statehood as expressed through authority and power to govern a defined territory and population.

"Citizenship means little, and carries few substantial rights or duties compared with membership in a family, clan, religious sect or ethnic community. Often the government cannot govern itself, and its officials may in fact be freelancers, charging what amounts to a private fee for their services.

When assessing whether a region's threat to break away is real or illusory, it is essential to consider its location relative to other regions of the country. Anecdotal evidence shows regions that have tried to break away have been those situated in the outer fringes. What facilitated Katanga, Biafra, the Niger Delta, Punt land, Somaliland, Southern Sudan, Cabinda, and Azawad breaking away was those regions proximity to other sovereign nations. Secessionist agitations being hatched from regions on the fringes is no accident since a path for escape when the insurgency fails is a consideration not lost on insurgent leaders. Governments threatened by secession task their military to use force to halt that treasonable act. The likelihood of war and even a greater likelihood of losing that war have made groups planning an insurgency to be

circumspect before putting that plan into action. Closeness to other countries also reduces the effectiveness of law enforcement in stopping smuggling, a major revenue source for border residents. Clapham (1998) believes that the resentment that citizens show toward government is due to governments' predictable practice of exacting tribute from its populations in any way it can. "A process that only results in alienation, evasion and the growth of an informal economy whose *raison d'etre* is to evade the demands of the state." At the same time, the penchant African governments have for concentrating power at the center makes the regions placed in the outer fringes poorly served in development projects in schools, hospitals, and road networks.

V. THE POLITICS OF SECESSION

Kamanu (1974) sees African countries' non-support of secession as a foreign policy contradiction for which they have not been able to give a credible answer. Nations supported self-determination under colonialism but have opposed the application of the same principle in a post-colonial setting probably fearing the dreadful consequences of secession. Every African government deems a group or a region's right to leave a union to form a sovereign state non-negotiable. Regionally-based separatist movements are disdained by governments which believe they have an exclusive right to sovereignty. Throughout the world, the supporters of separatist movements are considered criminals (Douglass and Zulaika, 1990). Victory in the resulting war which a government starts to restore national integrity overwhelmingly has been won by the government, bolstered by strong diplomatic support and superiority in troops and armaments. Not ceding to insurgents' demands was the strategy which Colonel Gowon, Nigeria's leader, chose when Biafra announced its sovereignty in 1967. According to Uzokwe (2003), Gowon, refused to accept Biafra's sovereignty and declared the secession illegal. He went on to amass 100,000 troops to crush the rebellion and reintegrate Biafra into Nigeria. This tough stance which governments take against insurgencies is intended as much to preserve a state's integrity, as it is to forewarn other factions from emulating this illegality in the future.

The African Union which has unflinchingly upheld the principle of states' inviolability has used its stature as a supranational organization to leverage leaders inside and outside Africa to hold back diplomatic and military support from regions that break away. This policy which the organization officially adopted in 1964 was meant to tamp down the fervor of self-determination which was running rampant during the first half of Africa's independence decade. The OAU feared that backing the declaration of self-determination from groups in newly independent nations would set the stage for an avalanche of demands, whereby every

group which was disenchanted with its government would seek to withdraw. The OAU's strong stance against secession, however, undermined its disenchantment with Portugal and Spain which had been holdouts for independence. Tanzania, Cote d'Ivoire, Zambia, Gabon, and Haiti recognizing Biafra as an independent state, exposed the OAU's seeming hypocritical philosophy. It was a symbolic statement of support either for Biafrans to keep fighting, or against the Nigerian federal government to stop its assault.

In the 1960s and 70s, the United Nations was conflicted, as the OAU was, about the appropriate response to give to ethnic groups and regions seeking self-determination from the countries of which they were part. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, respect people's civil and political rights. The UDHR, coming almost a decade before the great decolonization wave began in Africa and Asia, anticipated the self-determination effort which had begun in India and Pakistan and was poised to spread to Africa. In the 1960s, the United Nations supported every colony in Africa decolonizing, including imposing selective sanctions on the racist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa; yet it never backed Katanga and Biafra breaking away. Apart from the Soviet Union and Cuba supporting Ethiopia in the early stages of Eritrea's insurgency and the United States tepidly supporting Eritrea, Eritrea did not get any official backing from the United Nations or the OAU. The message must be clear, therefore, to a group or region wanting to break away that it might not get much external support even if it presents convincing evidence of atrocities or discrimination.

VI. THE PITFALLS OF LEAVING

The fear new African governments had that well-established kingdoms such as Buganda, Ashanti or Oyo would look inward and withhold support for their new nations was largely unfounded. It was not for lack of grievances from the old kingdoms or regions, however, but rather fear. Regions and their ethnic groups recognized the heavy odds it would face if their ragtag people's militia were to square off against well-stocked national armies. The horrific loss of lives which soldiers and civilians suffered in the Eritrea's war with Ethiopia and in the Nigerian and the Sudanese civil wars, have become ominous reminders of the daunting sacrifices a region or group inevitably will have to make if it tries to break away. Despite the relative calm existing in the relations between African governments and their administrative regions, it would be shortsighted for policy makers to assume that deeply felt grievances emanating from the regions could be treated lightly or ignored. Separatists' agitations are hard to uproot and may smolder for years because the most ardent promoters of separatism often enjoy folk hero status.

The constant clashes in Nigerian states, not just those in the Delta, between residents and immigrants about religion and economic opportunity are reminders of how fractious and intricate intrastate politics in multiethnic nations could be. It may serve African leaders well if they assumed the glue that binds the patchwork of groups inside their boundaries can unravel anytime under the flimsiest of provocations. Disagreements over property rights, border lines, smuggling, and members of one group ill-treating the members of another group have pitted groups against each other. Most disputes do not rise to the point of an aggrieved group wanting to pull out. Other disagreements, however, have, such as Tuareg rebels in northern Mali and Niger and Hutu rebels in eastern DRC wanting autonomy, and prompting armed intervention from government. Inside countries, regional inequalities and other causes such as population size and population concentrations can start a conflict (Raleigh, 2009).

Whenever a region or an ethnic group decides to break away from a sovereign state it has caused war that had been declared unfailingly by the government which believed its sovereignty had been breached. The resultant war had usually exacted a high price both on the region wanting out and the government wanting to keep its sovereignty. Even in Cabinda and the Casamance where rebel groups have not formally broken away by setting up independent sovereign nations, the hot pursuits which the Angolan and Senegalese military had undertaken to hound rebels have laid to waste people, property, and families. The costs associated with secession, not surprisingly therefore, have been those usually borne from war especially in human lives and the destruction done to property and the means of production. Also as occurs in wars, refugees internally or externally displaced become the inexorable collateral damage. The United Nations which since 1960 has continually provided peacekeepers to prevent Africa's internal conflicts from worsening has always borne a substantial part of the cost of those conflicts. The United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Congo—UNOC—the UN's first in Africa's independent decade, caused a financial crisis which plagued UN operations for several years. ONUC's annual cost was \$66million when the UN's overall budget was only \$70million and France and the Soviet Union refused to pay (ONUC, 1964). For its fiscal 2012 budget, the Security Council (2012) estimated a cost of \$7.8 billion for its peacekeeping operations worldwide, with the operations in Africa taking about three-quarters of the total. The greater part of the monetary cost of wars to reclaim territory, however, has been borne by the government which declares war. According to Okpaku (1972), the three-year Nigerian civil war cost the government 1,600 million pounds, or about the entire Nigeria's 1966 GNP. But it

was in the loss of lives where the greatest cost of the Biafran war was felt, especially in Biafra where most of the fighting took place. The war caused 100,000 military casualties and between 500,000 and two million civilians' deaths from hunger, starvation, and disease. Military spending in the Sudan picked up exponentially after 2000 when the government's war with the south intensified. From 2000 to 2006 (when data were available), the country spent three percent of its GDP on the military, amounting to \$13.9 billion (SIPRI). The politics and the war that defined Eritrea breaking away from Ethiopia were exercises in attrition. In early 1990, Human Rights Watch (HRW, 1990) reported Asmara, Eritrea's capital, being cut off from overland supply for more than 200 days as the Ethiopian military starved the city of food and supplies. Resentment between the two countries never subsided pushing the two sides to fight a war from 1998 to 2000. Air raids against civilians and the rounding up and expulsion of long-term Eritrean residents from Ethiopia and of Ethiopian nationals from Eritrea were the war's preferred strategy (HRW, 1998).

A region or an ethnic group that publicly declares its plan to leave a union risks becoming the target of resentment and suspicion by the government and other groups which may see such plan as a threat and a betrayal. The ill will created may last several years, especially when geographic distance becomes an impediment to promoting a uniform national culture. Despite a union consummated more than one-half century ago, some Zanzibar is are still opposed to the island's union with Tanzanians. Similarly, many Cabindans do not consider their enclave to be part of Angola. The Biafran war heralded the long-running insurgency in the Niger Delta. A war or any act of disobedience has usually drawn the fury of ruling governments to employ the strongest means available to end that threat. The strategy has been to employ the police or military to harass groups and individuals. Not surprisingly, wars in Africa concomitantly have also brought human rights abuses. From 2000 to 2007, HRW (2008) criticized the Angola's MPLA government for unprecedented human rights abuses in Cabinda, including the unfair trial of Fernando Lelo and four soldiers. Most of those detained in Cabinda were held in an unofficial military detention center, where they were tortured and held in inhumane conditions for months. In 2012, HRW (2012) also chastised separatist Tuareg rebels of northern Mali for committing many war crimes including rape, using child soldiers, pillaging hospitals, schools, aid agencies and government buildings. An Islamist armed group summarily executed two men, cut off the hand of at least one other, carried out public floggings and threatened women and Christians.

VII. CONCLUSION

The nonchalant manner in which African governments have treated the threat of any region of

their country breaking away epitomizes the mind-set most leaders have for not believing the threat exists, and if it does, having the ability to contain it. The logic behind this philosophy appears simple; leader believe the only answer to end rebellion is to use force, which would also forestall similar rebellious acts spreading to other regions. The inconsistent and vindictive manner in which governments have addressed regional problems, however, has not helped to muzzle regions or groups from expressing their grievances and apprehensions. Governments not showing empathy has indeed hardened the resolve disaffected regions have by engaging in asymmetrical warfare such as kidnappings and sabotaging economic facilities, which they believe would help them to achieve the goal of self-determination they have set. Places like Cabinda in Angola, Zanzibar in Tanzania, and the Casamance in Senegal which have become notorious for political ferment continue to keep their reputation. Like the governments they despise, these regions also believe the cause they are aiming for is just.

Even though Africans seem predisposed to ethnic or regional breakups, the behavior of governments to this threat suggests oblivion, ignorance or supreme confidence to subdue such threats if they should ever arise. The AU's condemnatory stance toward a region breaking away from a sovereign nation as well as the impressive record of success African countries governments have had against renegade regions, and the sporadic nature of such attempts explains governments' complacency to this existential threat. Even when the threat of a region breaking away is obvious, the credential of autocracy to which many African governments had worn prevents them from seeking compromise with groups with whom they disagreed. Even among governments which believe in the rule of law the conviction that the will of the sovereign must always prevail when addressing matters considered to serve parochial interests is strong. Governments believe they would pay an unredeemable price if they were to negotiate with groups that make strong demands for autonomy. The manner in which Nigeria's military government of Sani Abacha handled the Ogoni crisis in the mid-1990s showed prejudice, incompetence and brutality of the highest order against people of the Niger Delta. The military government treated the Ogoni in the manner it did because of an unstated prejudice the people in the Niger Delta were associated with the Biafran secession. Once a region tries to break away, the people living in that region are described as untrustworthy; a label from which the people in the region may find difficult to disentangle themselves. But the Ogoni had pressing issues they wanted the federal government to resolve. They had complained for many years about their deteriorating living conditions, especially the manner in which multinational oil companies were degrading farmlands.

It was in keeping with a string of poor judgments that the government of Sani Abacha arrested, tried, and hung Saro Wiwa, an environmental activist, in 1995. The Ogoni uprisings foreshadowed the unrests in the Niger Delta in the 2000s which has cost the country billions in oil revenues.

Over more than one-half century since Kantanga's secession began, African governments should have learned the lesson that sporadic but ominous regional rumblings will never stop, unless governments diligently address their causes. Communities that make significant contributions to the national economy must be rewarded amply for their good fortune. The stances which most governments have taken when addressing regional issues, on the other hand, have lacked pragmatism as they believe doggedly that ruling governments must have the final say in all matters about sovereignty. It should never be lost on any observer, however, that African governments' preferred nonchalant stance toward the menace of secession and other regional issues in general, may be deliberate because they do not want to spend extra money and personnel to evaluate them to come to solutions which would be long lasting. Grievances may be settled quickly and cheaply through force. Some observers would hope history would teach governments that constituents would be better served if they reflected on the escalating crisis in Mali of Tuaregs of the north breaking away from the south. The Bamako government never envisaged that a dormant grudge would be resuscitated by fighters coming home from Libya who have become emboldened by having access to a bevy of weapons to back up their demand. It seemed farcical that such unlikely events would permutate to create a crisis that may end the Republic of Mali as the world had known it. Sadly, having built a reputation for not planning for contingencies, African

governments are unlikely to draw any hard lessons from the Malian crisis.

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Notes:

¹ In June 2010, Somaliland held presidential elections in which Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo, the opposition candidate defeated outgoing president Dahir Riyale Kahin. International observers said the poll was largely free and fair, despite a few irregularities. "Somalia: New Somaliland President Looking for Recognition and Investment," *AllAfrica.com* July 3, 2010.

² In early 2009, the American military helped plan and pay for an attack on the Lord's Resistance Army, but the offensive went awry, scattering fighters who later carried out a wave of massacres as they fled, killing as many as 900 civilians. Jeffrey Gettleman and Eric Schmitt. U.S. Aided a Failed Plan to Rout Ugandan Rebels. *New York Times* February 9, 2009.

³ To show its sensitivity to the plight of residents of the Niger-Delta Region, the Nigerian Federal Government allocates substantial amounts of money to the nine states in the region. In 2009, out of 180 billion Naira designated as 'statutory transfers', 35.6 billion Naira was allocated to the Niger-Delta region to improve economic and social development. See The Appropriation Bill, 2010. Available at <http://www.budgetoffice.gov.ng/Bill2010.pdf>

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